



## GLOBAL: Non-traditional donors come to the WFP table



Photo: Abdullah Shaheen/IRIN  
WFP aims to feed nearly 100 million people in 2009

JOHANNESBURG, 17 December 2008 (IRIN) - High food prices and continued market volatility will increasingly make the UN World Food Programme (WFP) tap non-traditional donors like China and the corporate world for funds, as it warned that it would run out of cash by March 2009 to feed millions in hunger hotspots across the globe.

Christopher Barrett, a leading food aid expert who teaches development economics at Cornell University, New York, warned that the world should not forget the need to pull the poor out of the poverty trap; which the global food and fuel price crisis has made all the more threatening.

Donors have been "remarkably generous" to the WFP in 2008 and donated billions, said Richard Lee, a spokesman for the aid agency, but the combined food and fuel crisis has seen the numbers of hungry rise. The agency has already been forced to cut rations in Zimbabwe and Ethiopia.

And the numbers could climb further in 2009, said recent reports from the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the US-based International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

The 2008 food crisis has already pushed 40 million people into hunger, bringing the number of undernourished in the world closer to a billion, according to the [FAO's State of Food Insecurity in the World 2008](#).

Although food and fuel prices have come down they are still high because of market volatility, said the FAO. The costs of agricultural inputs, which have more than doubled since 2006 was expected to

make poor farmers plant less.

Looking ahead, [IFPRI warned](#) in its analysis of the double impact of the food price and financial crises on agriculture and the poor that the numbers of hungry would keep rising. In another 12 years, 16 million more children could be malnourished at a time when even fewer people would be able to afford staple cereals like maize, rice and wheat, which could cost between 13 percent and 27 percent more.

Conflict and bad weather in parts of Africa have also kept the funding requirements to feed hungry people high: Sudan (\$851 million), Ethiopia (\$633 million), Somalia (\$403 million), Zimbabwe (\$276 million), Afghanistan (\$275 million) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (\$258 million) top the WFP list.

The number of people needing food aid in countries like Afghanistan (8.82 million), Ethiopia (8.67 million), Sudan (5.95 million), Democratic People's Republic of Korea (5.58 million), Bangladesh (5 million), and Zimbabwe (3.98 million) - a total of 98 million people - are straining already stretched budgets. "We need \$108 million urgently to feed four million Zimbabweans in the first three months of 2009," said WFP's Lee.

### Non-traditional donors

Turning to non-traditional donors has paid some dividends: China recently made a \$4.5 million contribution in response to a global appeal by WFP to address the hardships created by high food and fuel prices, while Saudi Arabia donated \$500 million to help the WFP meet its funding shortfall.

In 2007 the food aid agency began a partnership to raise funds with Yum! International, which owns the Kentucky Fried Chicken and Pizza Hut brands and has 35,000 restaurants in 112 countries, and managed to raise \$16 million in the first year.

"We are looking towards individual contributions through the 'Wall Against Hunger', in which people can make donations in the name of any individual, whose photograph they can place on a virtual wall on our website," said Lee.

With an eye on traditional donors, Executive Director of WFP Josette Sheeran pointed out that a mere one percent of what has been tabled in the US and Europe for financial rescue and stimulus packages could fully fund the work of the agency. "As we take care of Wall Street and Main Street, we can't forget the places that have no streets."

### Way out

In its analysis IFPRI called for an emergency grain reserve to be set up as a long-term solution to the crisis.

Although the grain reserve was "indeed desirable", Barrett told IRIN, "addressing the underlying structural causes of human suffering" called for investment in "basic agricultural research and in human capital to enhance the poor's productivity, incomes and resilience, and in

improvements to institutional and physical infrastructure to help reduce the risks faced by the world's most vulnerable".

But investment had to be based on "hard evidence of what works and what doesn't." A few years ago, Barrett, along with Michael Carter, Professor of Agricultural and Applied Economics at the University of Wisconsin, made a case for increasing development aid to poor countries.

"The poor cannot eat currency, or soil, or the goodwill of neighbours or governments," he commented. "They must have access to markets and technologies that enable them to turn their assets into a sustainable income sufficient for a healthy life."

Barrett told IRIN that this time round, with limited budgets, "There is a direct trade-off between humanitarian relief and longer-term investment in addressing underlying structural causes of human suffering. That is why it is so important to identify and employ best practices, to steward scarce resources wisely."

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